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RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 2460
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 2887
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 5326
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RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000246

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR B. WALCH
DRL FOR N. WILETT
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
ADDIS ABABA FOR ACSS
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR J. HARMON AND L. DOBBINS
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR MICHELLE GAVIN

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [KDEM](#) [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: ZIM EDUCATION STILL IN LIMBO AS TEACHERS THREATEN
RENEWED STRIKES

REF: HARARE 226

Classified By: Charge d'affaires, a.i. Katherine Dhanani for reason 1.4
(d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Raymond Majongwe, the outspoken Secretary General of the Progressive Teachers' Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ), told us in a meeting on March 18 that teachers' unions are in the difficult position of working with the genuinely interested and committed new Minister of Education (MDC-M's David Coltart), and trying to satisfy the demands of teachers who are outraged at inadequate pay and the fact of illegitimate workers on the GOZ payroll. In order to stay relevant and not lose touch with its membership, the unions may go on strike again until the government increases pay for legitimate teachers and rids the payroll of illegitimate government workers. END SUMMARY.

Union Stuck Between Good Minister and Angry Teachers

¶2. (SBU) During our meeting with Majongwe, he took multiple phone calls from teachers demanding information on their salaries and agitating to go on strike since the government has not lived up to its promise to negotiate a higher salary for March. Majongwe explained that teachers had been told they would receive their salary of Z\$800 (which is essentially worthless) and the standard civil servant allowance of US\$100 in their bank accounts on March 19. On March 20, PTUZ told us that some of the larger banks in Harare had paid teachers while others, particularly in outlying communities, did not have cash. After months without bank lines, a long line of civil servants waiting for cash formed outside CABS building society in Harare on March 19 and 20. As teachers wait in long bank lines for their

US\$100, their classrooms remain empty. Majongwe confirmed press statements that PTUZ and the alternative teacher's union, the Zimbabwe Teachers' Association (ZIMTA), agree on the potential need to strike if salaries are not raised.

13. (SBU) Majongwe criticized Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's overestimation of the government's ability to pay wages, leading to disillusionment amongst the work force. Following Tsvangirai's promise, Majongwe's union called on Zimbabwean teachers working in South Africa and elsewhere to return home and rebuild Zimbabwe by returning to the classroom. The government promised it would negotiate a higher salary for the March pay check; however, that has not happened. Teachers, unhappy with the continued low pay, are ready to walk away again. Already, numerous teachers -- disgusted with Zimbabwe's continued economic instability -- who answered the call to come home have said that they will collect their March pay checks and return to South Africa, where they still have jobs and homes. While Majongwe and others had believed that the GOZ would have the money to pay civil servants, especially teachers, in foreign currency, they now recognized that the GOZ was indeed broke.

14. (SBU) PTUZ's starting salary demand of US\$2,200 per month has been widely reported in the press. Majongwe said teachers would be prepared to accept as little as US\$500 for now. He estimated teacher salaries in Zambia and Botswana are between US\$900 and US\$1300. With many Zimbabwean teachers working elsewhere in the region, Majongwe argued a comparable salary would help lure them back. With public

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schools charging fees over US\$100, many children, including those of teachers, have been turned away from schools for inability to pay. Teachers argue that the US\$100 allowance is inadequate and must be raised.

15. (SBU) Majongwe said he empathized with Minister Coltart's inability to pay a higher wage, but said that as a union leader, his responsibility is to negotiate with the GOZ and push for higher wages. An exasperated Majongwe showed us an article from a local paper in Masvingo published this week that accused him of "selling out" to the government and being overly conciliatory to the government. To stay relevant and responsive to teachers, Majongwe said he must respond to the teachers' concerns and not appear to be defending the government.

16. (U) Separately, Minister Coltart told the press on March 18 that the coffers are dry and said he could not promise "anything" in terms of salaries. In an encouraging move, Coltart also launched a National Education Advisory Board consisting of leaders of both trade unions and members of all political parties. The Board will map out a plan for the educational system.

How Many Teachers Are Left? No One Knows

17. (SBU) In a recent meeting, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education told Minister Coltart and Majongwe that there are 94,000 teachers -- officially -- in Zimbabwe. Majongwe believes there are only about 40-50,000 teachers, plus at least 30,000 youths -- most of whom were active in violent youth militias during the 2008 election campaigns -- who are on the government payroll as teachers. Majongwe said that 70-80 percent of the teachers are not qualified, having been appointed through nepotism or despite inadequate academic qualifications. In comparison, Zimbabwe had about 115,000 teachers in 2005. Without an audit or survey, it will be impossible to know how many "real" teachers remain in Zimbabwe. (NOTE: Finance Minister Tendai Biti recently told us there are 130,000 teachers on the books (Ref A). END NOTE.)

Thugs On The Payroll And In The Classroom

¶18. (C) During the election violence in 2008, the ZANU-PF machinery launched a coordinated series of attacks and intimidation in rural communities, often directed at teachers who had been assigned to work at polling stations for the March 2008 election and were perceived as MDC supporters. Majongwe told us that many of the perpetrators of those attacks are now receiving the US\$100 government allowance, having been added to the payroll of the government, often through the Ministry of Youth (now led by notorious ZANU-PF MP Saviour Kasukuwere) or the Ministry of Women (led by ZANU-PF's Olivia Muchena). In communities, these "employees" (ZANU-PF's Olivia Muchena). In communities, these "employees" flaunt their paychecks although it is widely recognized that they are not actually doing anything.

¶19. (C) In a development that just began this month, "employees" of these two ministries have established "offices" within classrooms across the country. According to teacher reports to PTUZ, these "employees" sit in small book rooms that are within the classroom where they can hear the teacher throughout the day. They are only there for the duration of the school day -- teachers and Majongwe believe they are there to spy on the teachers and to provide quiet

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intimidation. Press reports have indicated ZANU-PF youths have threatened teachers and insisted on sitting in on lectures to ensure teachers don't spread "MDC propaganda."

¶10. (C) Teachers are outraged by this new development, first because it is a continuation of the intimidation they have experienced at the hands of ZANU-PF since the run-up to the March 2008 election, and second because they see these fellow "civil servants" as not doing anything but still receiving the same US\$100 allowance. Majongwe said Minister Coltart was genuinely concerned and had asked him for additional evidence.

PTUZ Happy With New Minister, Despite Challenges

¶11. (SBU) Majongwe described Minister Coltart as a deeply concerned, compassionate, and level-headed leader. He noted the significant contrast with the previous minister, with whom he interacted only once -- when he was summoned to the ministry to be scolded for a public statement. Now, however, Minister Coltart has actively sought out Majongwe's opinion on numerous occasions, and they have met or spoken nearly a dozen times in the last month. Majongwe appeared sad when contemplating launching a strike against this new minister who is trying desperately to pull Zimbabwe's educational system from the abyss.

COMMENT: Show Me The Money

¶12. (C) Teachers have justifiable complaints that the US\$100 allowance is inadequate to cover a family's living expenses. At the same time, there is little understanding of how very poor and unproductive Zimbabwe has become in the past decade, with GDP per capita estimated at less than a dollar a day, making wage comparisons with neighboring countries, especially Botswana and South Africa, unreasonable. The government's commitment to pay higher salaries in foreign currency and inability to follow through may quickly produce a backlash. With open schools as a significant indicator of progress in the New Zimbabwe, renewed strikes could be disastrous both politically for the MDC and educationally for the children. END COMMENT.

